COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

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COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS is intended to provide quick updates on issues of interest to members and affiliates of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). It is produced regularly throughout the academic year. This issue covers the months of November and December 2004.

COU hosts gathering of MPPs

On November 29, 2004, Executive Heads of Ontario universities hosted a gathering of members of the provincial parliament. Several ministers, including Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, MPPs representing all parties, and political staff were in attendance.

The gathering was an opportunity for COU to introduce its new initiative, *Think Ontario*, to heighten public awareness of the issues facing Ontario universities within the context of the Postsecondary Review led by Bob Rae, Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. On display, using the *Think Ontario* banner, were a ceiling-high exhibit, a series of complementary posters and a computer presentation, all of which highlighted the five themes and questions posed in Rae's Discussion Paper:

- ***Accessibility:*** How can we increase participation and success in higher education?
- ***Quality:*** How should we improve the quality of higher education?
- ***Funding:*** How do we pay for higher education to ensure opportunity and excellence?
- ***Accountability:*** Do we have the right structures in place to know our system is achieving the results we want?
- ***System Design:*** How can we make sure that our institutions constitute a coherent, co-ordinated system to meet Ontario's goals for higher education?

Copies of *A Vision for Excellence*, COU's response to the Discussion Paper, and the brochure *Highlights of the COU Response to the Postsecondary Review* that summarizes COU's report were made available to guests. Both publications can be found online at www.thinkontario.com, the web component of the public awareness initiative.

Mr. Rae is conducting public hearings and accepting written and electronic submissions through to December. COU is asking the people of Ontario to take part in this important dialogue, and to share their views about what our province needs to ensure its continued strength, growth and quality of life. Additional information can be found online at the Postsecondary Review web site (www.raereview.ca) and the COU web site (www.cou.on.ca).

COU responds to the Postsecondary Review Discussion Paper

In the beginning of October 2004, Bob Rae and his seven-member Advisory Panel leading the province's Postsecondary Review published *Higher Expectations for Higher Education: A Discussion Paper.* By month's end, COU had submitted *A Vision for Excellence – COU Response to the Postsecondary Review Discussion Paper* to the Advisory Panel. The report combines analysis with specific funding proposals for a university-government partnership to ensure that Ontario has the highly skilled workforce and competitive research output it needs for prosperity and global competitiveness.

COU's submission is organized by the five categories – *accessibility*, *quality*, *funding*, *accountability* and *system design* – proposed by the Discussion Paper and makes recommendations in each category. Some recommendations establish a three-year time framework through to 2007-2008 for addressing the most pressing revenue requirements, while others ensure that the government is aware of the longer-term investments that are needed.

In summary, COU urges the government to make a substantial investment in universities by:

1. Providing a robust student financial assistance program;
2. Funding all eligible graduate and undergraduate students;
3. Increasing operating grants to the average funding per student in the other nine provinces;
4. Doubling graduate enrolment by 2013;
5. Addressing capital requirements and deferred maintenance; and
6. Investing to keep Ontario university research competitive.

COU also encapsulated its report into a four-page brochure entitled *Highlights of the COU Response to the Postsecondary Review*. Both the report and brochure are posted on www.thinkontario.com, as well as COU's web site (www.cou.on.ca).

In addition to *A Vision for Excellence*, two other COU reports were submitted to the Advisory Panel. *Campus in Decline*, produced by the joint Task Force of the Council of Senior Administrative Officers and the Ontario Association of Physical Plant Administrators, highlights the need for increased facility renewal funding for Ontario universities. *Proposed University Accountability Framework*, produced by the Standing Committee on Government and Community Relations, recommends a framework that, while recognizing the autonomy of Ontario universities, reflects the nature of their relationship with government. Both reports can also be found online (www.cou.on.ca).

Bob Rae attends OCUR dinner and meeting of Executive Heads

On November 24, 2004, Bob Rae, Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, attended a dinner hosted by the Ontario Council on University Research (OCUR) at the University of Guelph. Mr. Rae was at the university for a Postsecondary Review Town Hall Meeting. Dr. Alan Wildeman, Chair of OCUR and Vice-President (Research) at the University of Guelph, led the dinner discussion, which focused on the value of excellent university research to a high-quality postsecondary system. OCUR members were pleased with Mr. Rae's positive views about the importance of basic research across all disciplines. Dr. Alastair Summerlee, President of the University of Guelph, also attended the dinner, along with Helmut Zisser, Director of Policy for the Postsecondary Review.

Mr. Rae also attended a meeting with Executive Heads on December 9, 2004 to discuss a range of issues including college-university transfers.

Pamela Wallin receives 2004 OPAS Visionary Award

On November 8, 2004, Pamela Wallin, Canadian Consul-General to New York, was presented with the 2004 OPAS Visionary Award. Sponsored by Bell ExpressVu and held at the University of Toronto, the event was broadcast live to 36 universities at 25 sites across Canada, and was also simultaneously webcast. Students, faculty and invited business and government leaders attended.

In her address, entitled *Canada-U.S. Relations: A View from New York*, Ms. Wallin stressed the need for greater understanding between our two countries, citing not only the highly integrated nature of our economies but also the fact that we are friends, family and neighbours. Her comments were especially timely in light of the U.S. elections the week earlier. She stressed a need for "more

understanding and sensitivity" and to "get beyond stereotypes." An archived version of the seminar can be accessed through the OPAS web site (*www.opas-partnerships.com*).

Many of the participating institutions co-ordinated events to complement the seminar involving local trade experts, MPs and MPPs, and/or Chambers of Commerce. This was the 8th annual Visionary Seminar, organized by OPAS (Office for Partnerships for Advanced Skills).

Web-based system to respond to offers of admission now live at OUAC

In October 2004, the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) went live with its new online system for applicants to respond to offers of admission, completing the third part of a three-part, web-based application service for applicants to all undergraduate and teacher education programs. Applicants can now go online to complete their university application, review and amend their application, and respond to an offer of admission.

The first response on OUAC's new online system came from an applicant in China who replied just one week after receiving the university's offer of admission. Since then, the Centre has received and processed close to 100 online responses for various admission entry times throughout the year. But validating students' responses – and thereby passing on their decisions to the respective universities in a more timely manner – requires daily updates on admission offers. So, in concert with the new web-based system, all universities are now providing OUAC with electronic information on a daily basis about their offers of admission.

Although the process has been running smoothly, due in large part to an extensive six-week testing period before going live, OUAC will continue to monitor the system during the coming period, which has a relatively small number of offers at this time of year (mostly for January admission), in preparation for when the volumes will increase substantially in the academic cycle.

OUAC worked closely with a working group of colleagues drawn from seven universities to complete the design of the system, which was approved by COU in spring of 2003.

Details released on $10 million fund for nursing faculty

In the 2004 Ontario Budget, the government committed to creating a $10-million Nursing Faculty Fund for faculty completing their PhD in nursing. In late October 2004, details were released on how the fund would be allocated. The government will invest $10 million over four years to:

- Increase the number of students who are beginning the PhD in nursing programs from 13 to 23 students in 2004-2005, with enrolment levels expected to increase in future years;
- Pay the tuition of nursing faculty who enroll in the PhD in nursing programs; and
- Support enrolment growth in master's nursing programs that have been modified by adding distance education and/or part-time study to make them more accessible to nursing faculty.

This fund, which was created to expand access to graduate education for nurses, will boost the number of nurses with PhDs in the province and help educate the next generation of nurses.

Latest edition of *COU Briefing Notes* now available

COU recently published the 2004-2005 edition of the *COU Briefing Notes*, which presents an overview of key issues and facts on Ontario universities. Revised and published annually, *Briefing Notes* is designed to complement existing institution-specific documents, and is normally distributed to Board Chairs, Executive Heads, Board Secretaries, as well as to several government offices. Visit COU's web site, www.cou.on.ca, for a copy.

COFM sub-committee on e-curriculum established

A new sub-committee, established by the Undergraduate Education Committee of the Council of the Ontario Faculties of Medicine (COFM), will examine and assess e-curriculum and web-based educational initiatives at medical schools in the province. Currently, each of Ontario's six medical schools either offer e-programs or are moving toward complete web-based curricula. It is anticipated that the creation of this sub-committee in which each medical school is represented will facilitate the sharing of information and resources, expand collaboration among the schools and, consequently, increase the number of joint program initiatives.

Update on audits of undergraduate program reviews

In 1997, an audit process of Ontario universities' undergraduate program reviews was established to maintain and enhance the quality of undergraduate education in the province. Over a seven-year cycle, each university was visited by a team of auditors who assessed that institution's undergraduate program reviews according to guidelines issued by the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC), the body that oversees the audit process on behalf of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV). Each audit entailed a detailed assessment of the documentation provided by the university, an on-site visit and submission of a report of the team's findings.

The second cycle of audits is now in year two. The University of Western Ontario site visit was held in November 2004, and Carleton University will be visited in March 2005. The auditors' reports for the University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo were received by OCAV earlier in 2004. Two other reports – University of Guelph and McMaster University – have been completed, and will be on the agenda of OCAV's February 2005 meeting.

New OCAV Chair Sheila Embleton (York University) automatically succeeded Rowland Smith as Chair of UPRAC. Greg Moran (University of Western Ontario) continues on UPRAC and Neil Gold (University of Windsor) was elected by OCAV as the third member of that committee.

In May 2004, the University of Toronto hosted an OCAV-sponsored workshop attended by representatives from all Ontario's publicly assisted universities. The workshop focused on good practices and was structured around the components of the revised *UPRAC Review and Audit Guidelines*.

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